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ABSTRACT

The inner city aggregations of blacks, Appalachian whites, and Mexicans are not simply the focal points for short-term instability or remedial governmental programs: they are the first native American urban poor. The poor neighborhoods of America's inner city are a result of three great population movements. One originated in the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Black Belt and Delta regions of the South, a second in the coal fields of the Cumberland Plateau, and the third in the populous elevated plains of central Mexico. These three areas are superficially distinctive. Yet certain basic social relationships dominate these three areas. These disparate populations all barely subsisted. In each case rural marginality was exacerbated by the encroachment of large landholders and by the harassment of their legal and political instruments. The resulting economic marginality and dependency provide the context for the economic and political crises that decimated these areas. It is doubtful that these poor populations would have come to the city if it had not represented hope and escape. The image of the city was actively planted in people's minds by a variety of sources. The poor of five surveyed neighborhoods are subjected to a similar pattern of encirclement, intrusion, and abandonment. These present difficulties emerge from a shared experience with the past. (Author/JM)

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W3-5 THE ETIOLOGY OF POOR NEIGHBORHOODS

by

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Poor neighborhoods created newspaper headlines in the nineteen-sixties--the riots in Watts, Detroit and Newark, the rent strikes in Harlem and Boston's South End, the violence endemic to all urban ghettos--prompting some of America's most imaginative endeavors in planned social change. We witnessed the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency, the Mobilization for Youth Program, the "grey areas" program, the "War on Poverty," culminating in hundreds of community action programs, legal assistance offices and Head Start centers. The Federal government instituted well publicized investigations of the national malaise, dealing substantially or entirely with the deteriorating inner city. Reports were prepared for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, and the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice.

But with the cooling of the ghetto fires and with the institutionalization of community action programs, the air of crisis began to fade. Public officials no longer felt compelled to wage war on the blight and misery of the inner city or to decry the indifference to its deterioration. Of greater salience was the rising cost of meat, polluted skies, "forced bussing," and the war in Vietnam. The agony of being poor and the quality of life in poor neighborhoods had become irrelevant for the politicians and voters of the seventies. The "urban crisis" began to recede from the headlines and from the chronicles of historians and social scientists.

The difficulty, all along, in understanding poor neighborhoods has been this air of crisis--the need for immediate change, the demand for law and order--that has surrounded them. Poor neighborhoods gained sociological and historical prominence because of ahistorical factors that have proved ephemeral, leaving us with little more than the ruin of the riots--the leveled blocks and abandoned stores--as a basis for analysis. Limited considerations of this sort have led some to the

facile conclusion that "if these inner districts...were to suddenly disappear, along with the people who live in them, there would be no serious urban problems worth talking about."¹

But the inner city aggregations of blacks, Appalachian whites and Mexicans are not simply the focal points for short-term instability or remedial governmental programs. These groups are the first native American urban poor. Today's inner city neighborhoods are not the product of a potato famine in Ireland, land enclosures in rural England, unsuccessful political rebellions in Germany, pogroms in Russia or the extreme poverty of Southern Italy. The poor neighborhoods of the mid-twentieth century were created by events largely controlled by this country under conditions nurtured in the rural country side. The blacks who fled the Black Belt counties of the South, the whites who moved reluctantly out of Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia, the Mexicans who escaped the central plain of Mexico and the small towns of Texas and New Mexico lived under strikingly similar conditions, left the land at approximately the same time for many of the same reasons, and moved to neighborhoods suffering the same sorts of economic and political pressures.

The obsessive regard for headline events rather than for history or process has only obscured the role of poor neighborhoods in the most basic social changes of this century. To understand the formation and development of poor neighborhoods is to grasp a fundamental historical process, reflecting a pattern for the exploitation of rural labor and the imperatives of industrial growth.

I Three Great Population Movements

The poor neighborhoods of America's inner city are a result of three great population movements. One originated in the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Black Belt and Delta regions of the South, a second in the rich bituminous coal fields of the Cumberland Plateau, and the third in the populous elevated plains of central Mexico.² It is against this background--millions of displaced persons moving to urban centers--that we begin to appreciate poor neighborhoods, not as "problems," but as the end products of an historical epoch. We will not understand life in poor neighborhoods, or their politics, unless we appreciate the experience and the history that created them.

The black population of the United States remained relatively stationary during the half century following emancipation, confined for the most part to a belt stretching across central South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama, the Atlantic Coastal Plain and the Mississippi Delta. From time to time blacks traveled the railroads to the cities of the North. Some went to New York or Philadelphia; others to Chicago or Detroit. But rarely did blacks travel farther north than New York City or farther west than Chicago. Before World War I, few even attempted this distance, with nine out of every ten black persons in the United States residing in the former slave states. This figure had changed little since 1870.³

World War I shook millions of blacks loose from their traditional ties to the rural South. The first evidence of systematic decline in the southern black population occurred in Alabama and Mississippi during the teens. Blacks began to leave for the North in other sections of the South, but in most cases, the movement was not sufficiently marked to offset the natural increase in population. By the

twenties, however, more easterly states, like Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia were also beginning to experience net population losses. In the twenty year period from 1910 to 1930, approximately 1,000,000 blacks moved North.⁴ The blacks of the Delta moved almost exclusively to Illinois; farmers in the central Black Belt crossed Tennessee and Kentucky, then moved in three directions--to Indiana and Illinois, to Michigan and to Ohio; blacks living in Georgia and the coastal plain moved up the coast to the Mid-Atlantic states of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.⁵ Few attempted the trip to California.

Migration was halted for a decade during the thirties, but resumed with much greater force in the forties and fifties. During the two decades following the outbreak of the Second World War, almost three million blacks fled the South. The small stream that began in Alabama and Mississippi in the teens, that spread to Georgia and South Carolina in the twenties, swelled to a widespread, general migration in the forties and fifties. Blacks followed the traditional routes up the East Coast and along the Illinois Central Railroad line to the Midwestern metropolises, but were increasingly looking to war boom cities regardless of their location.⁶ Blacks moved in substantial numbers to the cities of the South⁷ and the West Coast. By 1960, the migration of blacks to the West almost equalled that to the Northeast and Midwest.⁸

The most massive internal migration this country has ever witnessed leveled off during the mid-sixties, but only after a remarkable dispersal of the black population. By 1969 as many blacks lived outside the South as in it, and 70 per-cent lived in cities.⁹

The Mexican contribution to poor neighborhoods is, in its initial phases, quite different from that of the blacks and Appalachian whites. The Spanish, mestizos and Indians settled the Southwestern United States (particularly the area that is now Texas and New Mexico) long before there were any significant English

or American settlements. Their entree into this country was achieved not by the radical transfer of populations, but by American territorial expansion, annexation and treaty agreements.

This small indigenous population, however, was overwhelmed by the rapid advance of Anglo settlements in Texas and California, and remained small and encapsulated. By the turn of the century, the only significant Mexican concentrations were in the stretch of border towns along the line that separates the United States from Mexico.¹⁰

The halting increase of the resident Mexican population, achieved in a half century by annexation and population drift, became a genuine migration flow during the first three decades of this century. Large numbers of Mexicans began to leave the Mesa Central--primarily the states of Michoacan, Guanajuato, and Jalisco¹¹--for the border areas and, eventually, for the large-scale agricultural, railroad construction and mining areas in the United States.¹² They moved through El Paso to northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, through the Rio Grande River towns to eastern Texas, and to Tucson in southern Arizona. Later in this period, they moved into California.¹³

The first major wave of Mexican immigration (1901-1910) coincided with the Mexican Revolution, when most of the immigrants moved to Texas. Of the 200,000 Mexicans living in the United States in 1910, more than half resided in Texas. But during the second major population movement in the twenties--involving almost a half million migrants--nearly as many Mexicans went to California as stayed in the more proximate areas of Texas and New Mexico.¹⁴

Very early in this migration it became apparent, despite the association of Mexican labor with agriculture and mining, that the migrants were destined for the cities. While large numbers sought work in the lower Rio Grande Valley,

the Salt and Gila Valleys of Arizona, in the fields around Fresno and the Central Valley counties of California,¹⁵ by 1930, Mexicans had congregated in Los Angeles, El Paso and San Antonio as well. The 1930 census showed 51 percent of the Mexican population in urban centers.¹⁶ Mexicans in New Mexico and Texas were still in predominantly agricultural occupations (though many commuted from the cities) but even during this early period, the California Mexican population was almost equally represented in manufacturing and agricultural work.¹⁷

Another migration of Mexicans to the United States came during the Second World War, but under terms radically different from those of other groups that immigrated in this period. Actual migration, that is, the establishment of permanent residence, continued at a rate only slightly greater than during the depression. But contract labor was greatly expanded under government auspices, permitting the entree of 430,000 "bracero" workers between 1942 and 1950.¹⁸ This transient work force was supplemented by a large number of illegal entrees ("wetbacks"), estimated at about 40,000 persons a year with between 40,000 and 80,000 persons living in California at any one time.¹⁹ The overall impact of this transient work force was to increase the urbanization of the Mexican population: Mexicans looking for contract or illegal work congregated in the border towns of Brownsville, Calexico and Laredo, while the downward pressure on wages encouraged the resident rural population to seek the more lucrative jobs in the cities. "Braceros" were under contract to remain in agricultural occupations, but many "jumped" contracts and tried to lose themselves in urban barrios.²⁰

Two important, but contrary, population movements followed the end of the Korean War. During the immediate post-war recession, the U.S. government carried out an extensive program ("Operation Wetback") to rid the country of Mexicans residing illegally (without working papers) in the Southwest. Over one million Mexican nationals were deported during the last two years of the Korean War, almost 900,000

in 1953, and over one million in 1954.²¹ But with the passing of the recession, the diligence of deportation authorities relaxed and legal entrees increased substantially.²² The bracero program was terminated in the mid-sixties, though in 1965, 100,000 Mexicans still entered the United States as contract laborers.²³

By 1970, there were five and one-half million Mexican-Americans residing for the most part in Texas and California. Eighty-five percent of those in California lived in the cities.²⁴

The third major migrant stream originates in the southern Appalachian Mountains, most noticeable in the coal counties of southern and central West Virginia and eastern Kentucky known as the Cumberland Plateau. On a scale barely perceptible to the great urban centers of the North Central United States, Appalachian families began to leave the coal fields and the small, unproductive plots of land about the time of the First World War. The exodus was small and uneven across the Plateau: some coal centers continued to show population increases during the twenties, a few evidenced small declines, and none lost population during the Depression.²⁵

The great migration began with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. During the two decades following World War II, the entire southern Appalachian region was decimated by population losses: nearly two million persons moved in this period, more than half a million left Kentucky alone. During the fifties, the Cumberland Plateau lost one quarter of its people. This flight continued until 1970, though at a rate only half that of the two previous decades. By 1970, the great exodus from the Appalachian Hills, if not concluded, seemed near exhaustion.²⁶

But if the abandonment of the coal fields was no longer important in the seventies, the Appalachian impact continued in the string of "Little Kentuckies" stretching from a cluster in southwestern Ohio (Cincinnati and Dayton) to Akron in the northeast, the railroad terminal and hog butchers in Chicago, and to the auto-

motive centers in Michigan. Some of the migrants moved into the growing cities of Kentucky and Tennessee, others moved east into Maryland and Virginia. But the great exodus from the eastern hills and coal fields of Kentucky was directed to the North Central region.²⁷ The concentration of Appalachian whites in the Midwestern urban centers is a direct result of the migration from such coal counties as Leslie, Harlan, Breathitt and Letcher.

Out of these three migrant streams, originating in the belt of black counties across the deep heartland of the South, the coal counties of the Cumberland Plateau and the central mesa of Mexico, emerge the poor neighborhoods of today. Millions of desperate people followed the railroads and highways of American, hoping to flee what became in the twentieth century an oppressive rural setting. The poor neighborhoods of today are a product of that flight and the life that was left behind.

Table 2.1
Migration and Poor Neighborhoods

Migrant Groups	Principal Migration Periods	Approximate Number of Migrants	Origin	Destination
Appalachian Whites	1940-1970	1,600,000	Southern Appalachian Mts. (Kentucky and West Virginia)	North Central United States
Mexicans	1910-1930	700,000	Mesa Central primarily, also, <u>Mesa Del Norte</u>	Texas and Southwestern United States
	1950-1970	700,000	Mesa Central primarily, also <u>Mesa Del Norte</u>	Texas and California
	1910-1930	1,000,000	Mississippi Delta; Black Belt; Atlantic Coastal Plain	Illinois, Michigan Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York
Blacks	1940-1965	3,500,000	Same	Cities Everywhere

i These figures are highly approximate. The results for the Mexican migration, for example, are obscured by contract labor, two-way migration, and illegal entrants.

II Rape of the Land

The Black Belt, the Cumberland Plateau and the plains of central Mexico are superficially distinctive areas. Black tenants and farmers in the South picked cotton and tobacco in the sprawling fields of the Black Belt, while Mexican labor on the large haciendas harvested cereals, maize and beans. Farmers on the plateau worked small, barren plots of land, usually near a creek bed. Each region displayed its own language or patois; each offered its own customs. Yet certain basic social relationships dominate these three areas, overshadowing, at least for the moment, the striking peculiarities of each setting. These disparate populations all barely subsisted, scarcely able to provide food and shelter for themselves and their families. In each case, rural marginality was exacerbated by the encroachment of large landholders and by the harrassment of their legal and political instruments. The resulting economic marginality and dependency provide the context for the economic and political crises that decimated these areas.

The marginality and dependency of the mass of rural blacks was ensured by a colonial policy that granted large tracts of land for development and by the requirements of a cotton economy. The southern region of the United States provided an ideal climate for the cultivation of cotton: 200 days a year without frost, but with adequate rainfall in the winter, spring and summer months. The long growing season and the profitability of cotton ensured its agricultural primacy. No subsidiary crop could be grown on the same soil, and during the harvest, all other crops were superceded.²⁸ Out of these factors--the profitability of cotton, the long growing season, and the nature of cotton cultivation--emerges the system of land concentration known as the plantation economy.

Plantations prospered in the fertile soil of central North Carolina, central and southwestern Georgia and the Mississippi Delta.²⁹ But their need for extensive labor necessitated the importation of black slaves, most of whom did not prosper. After the Civil War, large landholders adjusted to the termination of "forced labor" by parcelling out the land to tenants or croppers while maintaining a system of unified management.³⁰ The system of control changed as a result, but the bare subsistence existence of the black farm workers or their ties to the land were not substantially altered.

Black farm workers, as well as many whites, were bound to the plantations of the Black Belt through ingenious systems for remuneration. Sharecropping was the most common pattern throughout the South, especially in Georgia and Mississippi.³¹ It stipulated that the farm worker (the cropper) operate under strict supervision, with no control over the crops, and with only a share of the crop as payment. Share tenants were required to provide almost everything but the land and pay a portion of the crop as rent.³² Blacks were kept in a dependent state by the close supervisory system--usually involving the ringing of bells at the beginning and end of each working day³³ and a pattern of intimidation³⁴--and by the system of credit indispensable to survival during the long growing season.³⁵ Frequently, the sharecropper had nothing left from his crop after settling his accounts, or, more often, had just enough credit to get through the winter months. Moreover, a tenant could not move to another farm without settling his debts in full.³⁶

The marginality and dependence of sharecroppers were exacerbated by the risks of cotton and tobacco production that fell disproportionately upon them: their income was virtually dependent on the yield and the market price. During the Depression, sharecroppers fared badly, particularly those living in the Black Belt and lower Delta. Predictably, the migrations beginning during World War II drew most heavily on these sharecroppers.³⁷

"The Cumberland Plateau," Stewart Udall wrote, is a "mountainous region of flattopped ridges and steep-walled valleys, richly endowed by nature with dense forests, winding rivers, abundant game, loamy soils, and thick veins of coal."³⁸ It bears little resemblance to the elevated plains of central Mexico or to the flat expanse of cotton fields in the deep South. While most of the Appalachian people came to the United States as indentured servants for planters on the southern coast, they had long since shed the mantle of slavery and settled in the interior mountains of Virginia and Kentucky.³⁹ They were frontier people, crude and independent. Beyond what Toynbee has called their "poverty, squalor and ill health,"⁴⁰ their condition had little in common with the peonage of rural blacks and Mexicans.

Their story, however, begins with the trees. Late in the nineteenth century, large corporations were organized to exploit the thick forests on the plateau. They diligently maneuvered among the overlapping land titles of the highlanders, fostering a process where timber rights passed out of the mountains into the hands of "foreign" investors. The land that had supported the independence of the Appalachian mountaineer for so long was now one step away from his control, and the trees that had protected his frontier were now reduced to "the pitiful remnant of cull and second-growth timber."⁴¹

It was the large veins of coal, however, that ultimately destroyed the highlander's independence. Coal companies, including such industrial giants as the Inland Steel Corporation, the Consolidation Coal Company, International Harvester Corporation, Elkhorn Coal Corporation and the United States Coal and Coke Company, claimed the minerals of the plateau, leaving the highlanders with the illusion that they still controlled the surface of the land. By 1910, much of that land--three-fourths of the remaining timber, and more than 85 percent of the

minerals--belonged to nonresidents.⁴² When the highlanders attempted to prevent the coal companies from turning the surface into rubble, the courts held:

I deeply sympathize with you and sincerely wish I could rule for you. My hands are tied by the rulings of the Court of Appeals and under the law I must follow its decisions. The truth is that about the only rights you have on your land is to breathe on it and pay taxes. For all practical purposes the company that owns the minerals in your land owns all the other rights pertaining to it. ⁴³

With the corporations in virtually full control of the land and with mines being sunk throughout the plateau, the highlanders turned to coal for their livelihood. By 1929, one out of every four members of the work force was employed by the coal companies. A small number of blacks were brought into the fields during the boom years, and small groups of Italians, Poles, Slovaks, and Hungarians had come earlier. But even as late as 1930, native Appalachian whites made up three-fourths of the mine employees.⁴⁴ The Cumberland Plateau and its frontiersmen were now "tied inseparably" to coal, the railroads and "the colossal industrial complex centering in Pittsburgh."⁴⁵

Occasionally the Appalachian miners returned to the farms that had supported them at an earlier time, but for the most part, they were now controlled by outside corporations and a thorough-going system of paternalism. They often were required to live in company towns and to buy their food and supplies at company stores. Sometimes wages were paid in scrip, ensuring the entire pay check would eventually come back to company coffers. When company towns were incorporated, the coal companies invariably controlled the tax commissioner, the county judge, the council, the mayor and the police force.⁴⁶ The coal companies were assured, consequently, that taxes would not be burdensome, that the schools would not teach subversive ideas, and that the work force would remain dependent on the good graces of the company.

The marginality and dependency of rural Mexicans were also tied inseparably to the land. "There is a saying of our ancestors: 'Whoever sells his lands sells his mother,'" a New Mexico farmer declared. "It's a true saying. Land is what keeps you and me and everybody else."⁴⁷ But the land failed to keep the peasant population. Some three hundred years of Spanish dominion eroded the established system of land tenure defined by the Indians and substituted in its place a pattern of land concentration under the auspices of Spain and the Church. Alienation from the land was most pronounced in the Central Mesa region where the sedentary Indians were more vulnerable to Spanish colonization.⁴⁸ Mexican independence did not alter this pattern of land ownership. The Diaz regime continued to destroy village communal lands--contesting land titles and fostering land monopolization.⁴⁹

The process of land concentration was far more advanced in the central mesa region than in the mountainous and desert regions. For the most part, the land was carved into haciendas that dominated the small farms and often surrounded the free villages.⁵⁰ Only in the mountains were the independent free villages able to escape the encroachment of haciendas and ranchos. The majority of the rural Mexican population that lived in the central region was, by 1900, forced to live and work on these large estates.⁵¹

The haciendas became "feudal patrimonies" where free villagers and farmers were often transformed into peones de campo, a rural population tied to the soil on estates owned abroad. This system of domination provided the bulk of the hacienda's labor force free of charge, since many peasants were required to work "for the privilege of occupying the place," to pay a "work rental,"⁵² or to exchange a day's work for a day's ration of drinking water.⁵³ These laborers were tied to the hacienda through debts accumulated at the hacienda stores, by money gifts received at marriages--all of which had to be repaid before a worker could move to another estate or to a free village.⁵⁴ Because the farm workers were dependent on some share of the crop for their subsistence and their ability to make good on debts, they assumed, along

with the estate owner, the risk of raising the crops. It was common practice on the hacienda to reserve the high risk crops for sharecropping.⁵⁵

Yet the marginality and dependency common to these groups did not, in and of themselves, produce the population movements discussed earlier. Poverty had been characteristic of the Cumberland Plateau since its settlement, and the loss of frontier independence evolved for almost seventy-five years before the massive exodus to Ohio, Michigan and Illinois began. Southern blacks had never lived much beyond the pale of starvation and their dependency had been complete since they were wrenched from the African homelands. And even though the plight of the Mexican peasants worsened significantly during the nineteenth century, extreme marginality and dependency had been commonplace since the early days of colonization.

Economic and political crises finally forced blacks, Mexicans and Appalachian whites to reconsider living under the traditional patterns of economic marginality and dependency. Of the three regions, the central mesa experienced the most severe and thorough-going upheaval--one that destroyed the feudal ties to the haciendas, plunged the countryside into a quarter of a century of civil war, and precipitated the great Mexican migrations. The bloody Mexican Revolution of 1910 led many Mexicans to move their families and scant possessions to the border areas in Texas and New Mexico, where relative safety was assured. Many more began the trek north when hacienda properties were parcelled out to peasants and the free villages, and when debt peonage was abolished, thus cutting the most fundamental ties to the feudal past. While some redistribution was thereby effected⁵⁶ large numbers of peasants used their new freedom to escape the rural areas of Mexico altogether.⁵⁷

The bloody campaigns by General Robles aimed at restoring constitutional government in rebellious provinces led to a further wrenching of the traditional rural society and to a massive depopulation.⁵⁸ Before the disturbances of the

of the twenties ended (including the De la Huerta rebellion in 1923 and the religious upheavals of 1926) six million Mexicans had been liberated from serfdom⁵⁹ and hundreds of thousands of these newly freed men and women sought refuge in the United States.⁶⁰

The troubled mining industry created the conditions for the depopulation of the Cumberland Plateau. Depression struck at the coal industry and the timber market as it did industries throughout the country, forcing a large number of camps to suspend operations. In Appalachia, however, there were few alternative sources of employment. New managers, seeking to salvage the mines from retrenchment, acted to recoup their losses at the expense of the miners: they raised commissary prices, lowered wages and used blacklists and "goons" to fight unionizing efforts. Violence erupted between the workers and the company agents (Pinkertons and the local police), between union miners and those workers who resisted, between the miners and the black workers who were brought in from the South to break the union.⁶¹

After the war, the United Mine Workers began a series of strikes aimed, John L. Lewis declared, at making the operators "come to Carnossa," and in 1948, the first major post-war recession struck at the heart of the truck mining business in Eastern Kentucky.⁶² As a consequence, the six year period between 1948 and 1954 spelled financial ruin for the smaller operators and the small businesses that had grown up around the coal operations. The retrenchment of jobs was further advanced by the introduction of new technology--the "coal mole," the conveyor belt, the "shuttle buggy," and the roof-bolt⁶³--that increased the coal producing capacity of the mines at the same time it reduced the demand for miners. In 1957, the coal industry was at peak production (233 million tons), though the number of miners (122,243) had fallen below that of the depression.⁶⁴ The mines that had

raped the Appalachian frontier, that had created a dependency on the coal companies, were now a dead end. A Chicago migrant summed it up:

But the biggest portion a them [the mines] out there, now, is worked out, shut down, and the people has nothin to do. And the mines what are not shut down, they had men cut off. They got seniority rights there, you see, and you coundn but a job out there in the mines now. Not a Chinaman's chance a gettin a job out there in the mines. 65

No revolution kept black field hands from picking cotton, no union came between plantation owners and their labor force, no new technology influenced the cultivation of the crops. But before World War I, the boll weevil turned the fields into wastelands and drove both black and white sharecroppers from the land. The devastation of the boll weevil began in southern Texas in the latter part of the nineteenth century and had spread across most of the cotton belt west of the Mississippi River by 1908. The pest first entered the plantation country in southwestern Georgia and around 1916, and by 1921, had spread through the Georgia Black Belt.⁶⁶ As a result, plantations cut back on the number of renters and increased the number of croppers, forcing blacks into the least desirable and most dependent systems of remuneration. Some farmers stopped using black labor altogether.⁶⁷ In the mid-twenties, almost two-thirds of the black farmers indicated their sole reason for leaving the rural South was low cotton yield and diminished profits.⁶⁸

Economic marginality, dependency, and sustained economic and political crisis are the roots of migration from the rural South, the Cumberland Plateau and the central mesa. Together these forces in disparate parts of the country produced twentieth-century rural populations desperate for health and security, ripe for liberation, and susceptible to the lure of the cities

III The Lure of the Cities

It is doubtful that these poor populations would have come to the city (regardless of how severe the rural impoverishment) if there had been no promise of jobs, a decent home, and freedom from oppressive authority. The city represented hope. It represented escape.

The image of the city, however, was not something field hands or men deep in the mines conjured up in their heads. These images were actively planted in people's minds by a variety of sources. In each area, labor agents spoke of the dawning employment opportunities in the new industrial centers. Big city newspapers that circulated in rural areas told tales of migrants who had found jobs and freedom in the cities, as well as a new group culture and social life. Finally, many potential migrants received letters from relatives who had already gone to the city, heralding the prosperity that awaited their cousins and brothers in Chicago, Los Angeles or Philadelphia. These three streams of communication painted the same picture: jobs, prosperity and freedom.

If the blacks of the Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta did not already realize that the South was closed to them, the Chicago Defender made certain they knew. The Defender chided its Southern readers: "Have they stopped their Jim Crow cars? Can you buy a Pullman sleeper where you wish? Will they give you a square deal in court yet?"⁶⁹ The questions were rhetorical; the Defender's answer included the job listings for northern companies seeking Southern black labor and the not very subtle cry that the "land of hope," the "promised land," awaited them in Chicago. With a heightened sense of urgency, the paper urged its subscribers to put down their plows before the day of redemption passed them by and join the move-

ment that was going inexorably North. The paper declared:

Some are coming on the passage,
Some are coming on the freight,
Others will be found walking
For none will have time to wait. 70

Joining the beseechments of the Chicago Defender was a flood of labor agents who gave personal witness to the opportunities available in the North and who, on occasion, provided job guarantees and railroad tickets. Many Southern blacks answered the call of the Erie or Pennsylvania Railroads or the steel mills, though many used these first job offers as a vehicle for escaping the South. The Erie Railroad experienced a full turnover of 9,000 workers every eleven days and one steel plant, at least, was forced to hire 2,500 to 2,800 men a month, to maintain a work force of 5,500.⁷¹ The response to recruiting was so great that almost every Southern state, fearing the loss of their cheap labor force, began registering labor agents. In Georgia, for example, the city of Macon required agents to pay a license fee of \$25,000 and to supply recommendations from ten local ministers, ten manufacturers, and twenty-five businessmen.⁷²

After the initial wave of migration, relatives proved as important as any other factor in encouraging migration and facilitating the transition to the city. When the city was not far from the rural homestead--as in Savannah--many potential migrants first made temporary visits, then acquired temporary employment, and gradually increased the length of their visits.⁷³ Sometimes migrants used a whole string of relatives to work their way up the coast from a Southern town to a border city (like Baltimore), finally seeking out relatives in New York. Employers in Ohio were very conscious of the strong kinship network that bound many migrants to their families still living in the Kentucky hills. Rather than send agents wandering

around the creek beds or advertising in newspapers, employers usually passed word of jobs in the plant; they depended on the kinship network to communicate the information to relatives living in the city and, via letter or weekend visits, to friends and relatives still on the plateau.⁷⁴

What was a haphazard process of labor recruitment in the deep South and the Cumberland Plateau (involving newspaper advertising, itinerant labor agents and kinships networks) was a highly formalized procedure in the Southwest. The initial bracero agreement between the United States and Mexico made during World War II arranged for Mexican nationals to enter the United States to work in agricultural occupations, provided there were written contracts, a guaranteed minimum wage, decent housing and sanitation, and round trip transportation expenses.⁷⁵ Under the more formalized agreement following the War (Public Law 78) the Secretary of Labor was authorized to "recruit such [agricultural] workers, establish and operate reception centers, provide transportation, finance subsistence and medical care in transit, assist workers and employers in negotiating contracts and guarantee the performance by employers of such contracts."⁷⁶ This policy was supported by the growers' associations (such as the Central Valley Empire Association) and "agribusiness" in California came to depend on the cheap labor pool it provided.⁷⁷

The Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta, the Cumberland Plateau, and the central mesa region were volatile areas in the twentieth century, ready to loose thier impoverished and desperate populations or proximate regions. The large cities in the United States (like Philadelphia in the East, Detroit in the Midwest, Atlanta in the South, Cincinnati, Dayton and Hamilton in Ohio, and San Jose in California) viewed these strangers with suspicion but also with a sense of need. European immigration had been reduced to a trickle by the war and immigration restrictions had created a heightened demand for cheap labor. Industry, Chambers of Commerce, business boosters and governments turned to these

impoverished regions and welcomed their people yearning to be free. Blacks, Mexicans and Appalachian whites came to the cities of the United States not simply out of a desire to escape the marginality, dependency and crisis of their homelands, but because jobs were available to them in the cities and because labor agents, newspapers, relatives and governments encouraged and facilitated their migration.

IV The Development of Poor Neighborhoods

When America's poor, rural peoples came to the cities, they sought out the neighborhoods that would least tax their limited resources and that would provide the most secure entree to the city. They looked for inexpensive housing. They sought out their relatives and friends. They chose to live with people who understood their way of life, who spoke their language and who had come to the city for many of the same reasons.

What the migrants did not seek, and what they certainly did not foresee, was the permanency and deterioration of these first settlements. In most cases, the poor moved into the worst housing, buildings that deteriorated further as poverty-stricken migrants from the South, Appalachia or Mexico continued to arrive. These tendencies were exaggerated at first by the inclination of these peoples to live together and by severe housing discrimination in other parts of the city. With the coming of freeways and superhighways and the advance of urban renewal, these poor neighborhoods were placed under even greater pressure. Homes were demolished. Highways, public facilities and high rises created segregated, walled-in cities for the poor. Public parks and services were allowed to fall into disuse. When the upwardly mobile of the first generation migrants began their exodus to other parts of the city, the now ghettoized first settlements faced accelerating problems in housing abandonment and crime.

Contemporary poor neighborhoods, the repository for the massive migration from America's rural areas, are segregated, often physically marked off from the rest of the city, include the worst housing and suffer from the most violent, entrenched crime. The cities have given up on them or actively seek to destroy them; many of their long-term residents have abandoned them.

This, at any rate, is the situation in five poor neighborhoods.

A. Gardner

Gardner is a small residential community in San Jose, one of a string of eighteenth century Spanish settlements which stretched along the California coast from San Diego to San Francisco. The city began in 1777 as a Franciscan mission, nestled on the banks of the Guadalupe River⁷⁹ at the southernmost tip of the San Francisco Bay. The slopes of the Diablo Range rise on the east and the Santa Cruz Mountains on the west, placing San Jose in a valley no more than twenty miles wide, but endowed with some of the richest farmland in the world. Over the years, the Santa Clara Valley has provided a rich crop of fruits and vegetables; it has supported a large number of canneries, packing houses and frozen food plants, many of which are located in San Jose. Principal concerns still operative include the California Cannery and Growers with four plants in San Jose, Del Monte with three, and the Dole Company.⁸⁰

San Jose is a growing city. New tract housing is expanding as far as the eye can see and the hills will permit, destroying vineyards and orchards in its path. Within the last two decades, city officials have moved the boundaries out from the original seventeen square miles to include a sprawling 137 square miles of farm land. The population has risen from 95,000 in 1950 to an incredible 437,000 in 1970.⁸¹ Lost in this expansion are some 16 percent of the population who are Mexican-Americans.

Many barrios are simply absorbed by cities that reach out for more land, creating pockets of impoverishment within a new suburban prosperity. There are such pockets in San Diego and the San Fernando Valley; small agricultural labor communities have certainly been overrun by San Jose. But that is not the situation with Gardner, nor with most core-city Mexican American neighborhoods. The Gardner neighborhood is an old inner city community, one of the principal areas for twentieth century Mexican settlements. Its homes are predominantly single family, single story stucco houses. They are generally in good repair. Many have been newly painted. All have small yards and some are a testimony to careful attention and thoughtful landscaping. But, Gardner's housing, despite its relative adequacy (compared to Harlem, for instance), is the oldest, cheapest and the most deteriorated in the city.

Gardner's residents responded to the call of the progressive Growers Association of Santa Clara, coming to work in the thriving orchards and processing plants in and around San Jose. But few still work in the fields, except on a seasonal basis, and, in recent years, the canners and packers have begun to move their operations to other parts of California. At the time of the survey, 20 percent of the sample was out of work and an additional 10 percent had given up the search. In 1971, more than half of the residents, because of old age, inability to find employment, or apathy, were outside the labor force.⁸³ The residents of Gardner are poor--in fact, the poorest in the city, with almost 50 percent of the population having incomes under \$3,000.⁸⁴

Urban renewal and highways have devastated Gardner. The Park Center urban renewal project carved a 55 acre patch out of the northeastern section of the Gardner neighborhood. This section remained vacant and desolate for years for want of a developer, but now houses a new city library, a civic auditorium complex and a host of banks. More than 20 percent of the people living in this area have been forced to move and the housing surrounding the project has deteriorated appreciably

in recent years.⁸⁵ In the very core of the neighborhood, the city has constructed a gigantic freeway interchange, although the two intersecting highways have yet to be built. When they are completed, the neighborhood will be chopped into four distinct and wholly separate pieces.⁸⁶ In the midst of this dissection and demolition, settlement of the soil around the river is causing foundations to break up and sidewalks and streets to crumble.

While many Mexicans continue to come to Gardner for its cheap housing, it has been abandoned by the city and by many of its former residents. Gardner has been losing population for the last ten years to the Mexican-American concentrations in the south and more westerly sections like Olinder, Mayfair and Tropicana.

B. Belmont

The Belmont neighborhood in Hamilton, Ohio, is a loose association of blocks made discontinuous by large highways, railroads, a river and the city boundary. Its poorest section, commonly called "Peck's Addition," is set off from the central part of the city by a park and the Great Miami River and from the rest of the neighborhood by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and a major north-south highway. The Addition contains twelve blocks of some of the worst housing available in America. Many of the buildings are without floors and perhaps a third of them have only one room. Several of the nearly 100 structures are renovated chicken coops; only one of the eighty-seven housing units listed by the 1960 census is considered "completely sound." The entire area is a junk yard, strewn with rusting, abandoned automobiles and a great variety of trash.⁸⁷

The largest section of Belmont is, except on its northern boundary, completely removed from the other residential areas of the city. To the south is a large shopping area and the small Hamilton airport. Erie Boulevard, the north-south artery, forms the western boundary and is surrounded on either side by

small manufacturing concerns, hamburger stands, motels, automobile showrooms, etc. Tylersville Road and the city limits enclose the area on the east. The houses are small, frame, and often in need of paint. They are sometimes "substandard"-- a number still have outhouses. But they are not the work of "squatters." Each house has a small yard, often converted into a marginal corn patch. And while the roads are hardly equal to those in the rest of Hamilton, they are at least paved.

To the south and east of this area are scattered homes in a similar state of disrepair, but which fall within Fairfield Township and outside the jurisdiction of Hamilton. This area is rural in tone, although the residents are very much a part of Belmont.

Scattered groups of Appalachian migrants began arriving in Belmont before World War I, responding, at least in part, to the recruiting efforts of Champion Papers. It was rumored, a Champion employee remarked, that the president of the company went into the hills of eastern Kentucky to look over the area and to talk to the highlanders. Full scale migration did not begin, however, until after 1940. Pausing only for the recession of the late fifties, migrant families came to Hamilton, sought jobs at Champion Paper, Fisher Body, Beckett Paper or other plants. They settled, for the most part, on the east bank of the Great Miami River.

Hamilton and the entire Ohio Valley region (including Cincinnati, Dayton and Middletown) have long enjoyed a reputation as an industrial center and attracted settlers from New Jersey and Pennsylvania (who came down the Ohio River through Marietta) as well as miners from Kentucky.⁸⁸ The opening of the Miami and Erie canals in the 1820's and the construction of a "hydraulic" plant on the Great Miami River fostered industrial development in Hamilton, particularly the paper mills which depended upon local timber, waterpower and water and rail transportation.⁸⁹ In 1940, almost half the work force in Hamilton was engaged in manufacturing, compared to a national average of 23 percent; in 1960, 46 percent were still employed

in industry. At least half of the industrial employment was in paper and paper products and in autobody stamping.⁹⁰

The fate of Belmont and Hamilton are unclear. While no super highways are expected to further separate Belmont from the more affluent west bank of the river and no major interchanges are planned in Belmont, urban renewal will certainly have an impact in the next few years. A Miami University extension campus is expanding along the east bank of the Miami River and all the houses in Peck's Addition will be levelled. They will be replaced by a school board site, a new high school and a \$500,000 covered ice rink.⁹¹ No new housing is planned in the Belmont area. Moreover, in-migration from Kentucky had practically ceased by 1969, underscoring Hamilton's decline as a manufacturing center. The paper industry has stagnated locally and companies with antiquated physical facilities are moving to new locations.⁹² The 1970 population was 67,865, down 6 percent from 1960.

C. The East Side

Beginning with a dozen saw mills,¹¹¹ Detroit drew upon the Erie Canal, Lake Michigan and an extensive railway network to develop a vast nineteenth century industrial complex.¹¹² The carriage, wheel and marine engine companies blossomed by the turn of the century into a mammoth automotive complex under the leadership of Henry Ford, Ransom E. Olds and Charles Brady King.⁹³ By 1926, 77 percent of the work force in Detroit was employed in manufacturing.⁹⁴

Automobile companies, particularly Ford, were quick to exploit the large pool of Southern black labor. Recruiters were sent to the Black Belt and the Delta, flyers were distributed and trains chartered to carry the teeming black population to "Michigan City." Blacks feeling the devastation of the boll weevil, hailed the L and N Railroad to Cincinnati, then the M.C. Railroad to

Detroit. By the beginning of World War I the surge of migration had made the work of labor agents superfluous. Blacks were coming to Detroit by the thousands from Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi⁹⁵ to cash in on the "Ford Bonanza:" a guaranteed minimum wage of \$5 a day in 1914, \$6 a day a few years later.⁹⁶ By the mid-twenties, 10,000 black men were employed at Ford, comprising 10 percent of their work force.

From the time Detroit served as a center for the underground railroad to 1910,⁹⁷ the city's black population remained small and stable: a mere 6,000 people representing 1.2 percent of the total population.⁹⁸ But during the First World War, the black population increased seven fold, reaching 41,000 by 1920.⁹⁹ After the war, blacks continued to congregate in Detroit and by 1930, the black population had increased to 120,000.¹⁰⁰ The most sustained in-migration came, however, in the forties when the massive industrial complex was straining to meet the demands of war-time production: over 100,000 blacks between the ages of 24 and 40 came to work in the Detroit automobile plants.¹⁰¹

When blacks first came to Detroit in large numbers (1910), they settled close to the factories in an area east of Woodward Avenue and south of Grand Avenue known as "Paradise Valley." They lived with the noise of the factories, with the smoke and fumes. By 1920, many were moving east toward Gratiot Avenue. Blacks infiltrated only a few pockets on the West Side; most remained, crammed into the already deteriorated East Side. In 1919, the Associated Charities reported:

There is not a single vacant house or tenement in several Negro sections of the city. The majority of Negroes are living under such crowded conditions that three or four families in an apartment is the rule rather than the exception. Seventy-five percent of the Negro homes have so many lodgers that they are really hotels. Stables, garages, and cellars have been converted into homes for Negroes. The pool-rooms and gambling clubs are beginning to charge for the privilege of sleeping on pool-room talbes over night. 102

The Housing Commission reported at the height of the depression that 85 percent of the houses east of Woodward Avenue were unfit for human habitation.¹⁰³ During the continuing migration after the war, blacks moved south to the river and east across Gratiot to Mt. Elliot Avenue.¹⁰⁴ Not until the fifties, however, did large numbers of blacks move across Woodward to the better housing on the West Side.

During the fifties, Detroit began to encroach on the East Side. The Edsel Ford Freeway cut across its northern boundary; the Chrysler Freeway formed a new western boundary; and their intersection in the northeast sector of the East Side obliterated what remained of "Paradise Valley." The Gratiot Redevelopment Project, a modern upper middle-income housing complex, replaced some of the neighborhood's oldest housing (black housing).¹⁰⁵ What remains on the East Side is a mixture of industrial plants, older, dilapidated housing (particularly in the areas nearest the Chrysler Freeway) and some decent one and two family homes (in the areas nearest Gross Point).¹⁰⁶ The East Side is now subject to frequent muggings, armed robberies, larcenies and murder, with a fifty square block section in the neighborhood's center singled out as one of the highest crime areas in the city.¹⁰⁷

D. Summerhill¹⁰⁸

More than any other neighborhood we will consider, Summerhill is being traversed, strangled and demolished by the progressive development of the city. The principal east-west expressway passes through what used to be the northern part of Summerhill and intersects with the primary southbound expressway in a maze of ramps, bridges and underpasses right in the center of the neighborhood. Route 75 South cuts through the center of Summerhill as well. At least a thousand non-white families were displaced by these roads.¹⁰⁹ Forty-three

acres of Summerhill homes--5,500 buildings--were razed to make room for the \$18 million Atlanta Stadium. Surrounded by acres of open parking lots, the stadium reigns over Summerhill as Mt. Vesuvius lords over Pompeii, seeming to defy the highways, deteriorating housing and abandoned stores that make up Summerhill.

In addition to this frontal assault is the petty harrassment that has further accelerated the deterioration of the neighborhood. The expressways, for example, serve primarily as feeders for the stadium and as commuter routes, causing a double-edged problem. First, the scarcity of local ramps makes it very difficult for Summerhill residents to use the highways, thus causing considerable traffic congestion within the neighborhood. Second, during stadium events, the local streets are clogged by overflow parking and traffic tie-ups. Consequently, the Model Cities board devotes more of its time to facilitating traffic flow than it does to housing construction or to the maintenance of neighborhood facilities.¹¹⁰ The old warehouses and abandoned stores on the north end, large truck storage facilities, the scrap metal and junk yards along the railroad line in the south simply add to the blight that surrounds these "public improvements."

Summerhill, now the oldest black community of any size in Atlanta, was not the first black settlement. The early migrants clustered primarily in the "Old Fourth Ward" just to the north of Summerhill. In the 1880's and 90's blacks congregated around the railroad tracks on Decatur Street. Ellis Row, Fuller Row, Edgewood Street and Houston Street. Many came to work for the railroad and settled near it.¹¹¹ Decatur Street, now a shell of deteriorating warehouses and empty stores was at the center of black business and cultural life before the turn of the century. Its western end no longer exists: it

has been replaced by new construction in the downtown area. Auburn Avenue is still a substantial commercial area housing some of Atlanta's most important black businesses (including Citizens Trust and Atlanta Life).¹¹²

During the twenties, when the great in-migration of blacks began, the migrants moved beyond the "Old Fourth Ward" to Summerhill and the neighborhoods immediately west.¹¹³ By 1940, the black population of Atlanta was distributed almost equally between the West Side, the "Old Fourth Ward" and the Summerhill area.¹¹⁴ Since the war, however, only the West Side has escaped the consequences of progress. The "Old Fourth Ward" was the victim of downtown expansion; Summerhill was devastated by highways and the stadium. The collapse of the "Old Fourth Ward" shifted the population to the West Side (West Adamsville and West Center Hill), the southwest (Southwest Ben Hill and Southwest Adams Park), and East Atlanta.¹¹⁵

In the face of aging, urban development and the movement of blacks to more affluent areas in the east, west, and southwest, Summerhill has become a haven for poverty and crime. Almost half of the houses suffer from minor deterioration and an additional third show signs of major deterioration or delapidation. Fifty-four percent of the residents lived on poverty incomes in 1966, the number receiving AFDC payments having increased 36 percent since 1963.¹¹⁶ The census tracks that comprise the Summerhill neighborhood rank second, third, fourth, fifth, eighth, and tenth out of a city-wide total of 112 on delinquents per 1000 population. One track ranks in the top six on both day and night burglaries and on murders.¹¹⁷

E. North Central

W.E.B. DuBois called Philadelphia "the natural gateway between the North and South." For a hundred years, "there passed through it a stream of free Negroes and fugitive slaves toward the North, and or recaptured Negroes and kidnapped colored persons toward the South."¹¹⁸ The black population of Philadelphia had been considerable since the revolution, reaching a pre-twentieth century peak in 1810 when almost one out of ten residents were black. Before 1900, Philadelphia had the largest black population of any Northern city (including New York and Chicago) and of any Southern and border city except Washington, Baltimore and New Orleans.¹¹⁹

The first substantial wave of black migration came during the last decade of the nineteenth century, increasing the black population in Philadelphia by 60 percent.¹²⁰ The influx of Irish immigrants slowed this pace in the first decade of the twentieth century,¹²¹ but the massive flight from Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia in the next score years pushed the black population beyond 200,000 by 1930.¹²² Rural blacks were reluctant to enter the tight urban labor market during the depression. Consequently, Philadelphia, like most other Northern cities, witnessed no appreciable change in the black population in the decade preceding World War II. The War, however, renewed black interest in the city. The black population increased by 125,000 in the forties, and by an additional 153,000 in the fifties. Over half a million blacks lived in Philadelphia in 1960--almost ten times the number there in 1900.¹²³

Before Philadelphia felt the full impact of mass migration, most of the city's blacks were servants or domestics; a sizable, though smaller, group were common laborers.¹²⁴ Increasingly, during the period preceding World War I, blacks came to Philadelphia to work on the railroads, in the refineries and steel mills.

The Midvale Steel Company, for example, which employed 200 blacks in 1896 had 400 black employees in 1917.¹²⁵ Other companies brought blacks to Philadelphia as strike breakers.¹²⁶ By the time World War II broke out, the principal employers of blacks were the Pullman Company, the Pennsylvania and Baltimore and Ohio Railroads, the Philadelphia Transportation Company, the Philadelphia Electric Company, and the New York Shipbuilding Corporation.¹²⁷ The black population of Philadelphia, which began as a servant class, is now primarily an industrial population centered in the large manufacturing plants along the Schuylkill River.¹²⁸

Before 1920, blacks settled around Sixth and Lombard Streets, an area south of present downtown Philadelphia.¹²⁹ This restricted slum community, however, could not accommodate the large number of rural blacks who came to Philadelphia seeking industrial employment. Blacks began to settle across Broad Street, as far north as Susquehanna Avenue (now the principal commercial center in North Central). Others moved immediately to the west, across the river from downtown.¹³⁰ While the black neighborhoods of South Philadelphia remained relatively stable after 1900 (about 20,000 people) the North Central and West Philadelphia communities continued to grow until 1960. By 1950, the peak of black migration, almost half the black residents of Philadelphia lived in North Central.¹³¹ The great in-migration of blacks from the Atlantic coastal region and the Black Belt had shifted the core area of Negro life in Philadelphia from a small area in South Philadelphia to the sprawling slums of North Central.

North Central, like the other poor neighborhoods we have discussed, suffers from deteriorating housing, a high crime rate, and abandonment. The homes in North Central are brick and row-type structures, almost all built before World War II. In 1960, one quarter of the housing units were deteriorating or delapidated; the substantial efforts on the part of the city to do scattered site

renovation and to build public housing ¹³² have failed to keep pace with the accelerating rate of home abandonment. Almost 24,000 houses have been abandoned in Philadelphia, most of them in North Philadelphia, ¹³³ leaving many structures with boarded windows and glass and brick-strewn streets. Deterioration and home abandonment also contribute to the high rate of residential fires. ¹³⁴

The deterioration of North Central is partially the result of code enforcement policies during the sixties, the encroachment of middle class renovation on the southern borders of the neighborhood and the expansion of Temple University. But North Central has not been encircled by a freeway system as have other poor neighborhoods; nor have its homes been demolished to make way for a stadium or civic center. At the root of this neighborhood's decline is abandonment of North Central by upwardly mobile blacks. For the first time in fifty years, North Central lost population during the sixties. ¹³⁵ Its residents moved north to Mt. Airy and Germantown, across the river to West and South Philadelphia. In their wake they left the poorest black residents of the city, the least stable families, and frequently, houses that could not be sold or rented. ¹³⁶

Adult crime, juvenile delinquency and street gangs are more widespread in North Central Philadelphia than in any other police district in the city. In 1968 there were 35 homicides, 71 rapes, 652 robberies, and 1570 reported burglaries. In every conceivable crime category, North Central ranks number one in the city; overall, one out of every ten crimes committed in Philadelphia. ¹³⁷ Territorial conflicts between street gangs accounted for more than 200 killings in the past seven years.

V Conclusions

The etiology of poor neighborhoods reveals, above all else, how much the urban poor share in their experience. The poor of these five neighborhoods are subjected to a similar pattern of encirclement, intrusion and abandonment. Expansive highways traverse poor communities, chopping them into unconnected pieces or skirt their borders, hiding and segregating them from their more affluent neighbors. They often converge in the very heart of poor neighborhoods in a great catharsis of overpasses, underpasses, ramps and off-shoots. Urban and civic improvement (e.g., dormitories, community theaters, parking lots, football stadiums) intrude on the neighborhoods' fringe areas, razing block upon block of housing, abetting deterioration and land speculation. While highways and public improvements continue their work, seemingly undaunted by the existence of established communities, the upwardly mobile flee these areas of first settlement in favor of new housing opportunities elsewhere in the city. Poor neighborhoods stand forsaken as a consequence, faced with accelerating problems of crime and home abandonment.

These present difficulties emerge from a shared experience with the past. The residents of each of these neighborhoods trace their roots, either directly or through their parents, to the hinterlands of North America. While their origins are disparate (the Cumberland Plateau, the Atlantic Coastal Plain, the Black Belt, the Central Mesa of Mexico), they share a fundamental relationship with the land and with authority. The rural poor--brown, black or white--were denied title to productive property and stood helpless before the will of large landowners, plantation masters and mine bosses. Their economic marginality became intolerable under the added pressure of revolution, recession and natural disaster.

The poor first came to these neighborhoods looking for jobs and freedom. They went to work on the assembly lines at Ford, in the canneries and packing houses, in the paper mills--anywhere they could find work and earn a decent wage. Two twentieth century wars brought hope of prosperity and a steady stream of new migrants, interrupted only by the depression. They came because industry needed them and recruited them, because newspapers and relatives foretold a better life in the cities.

The etiology of poor neighborhoods is a story of modernization and urbanization, where each community plays a role reminiscent of all the others. The story portrays common threads of historical development, indeed, the constituent parts that make these neighborhoods distinctive. It is inevitable that we ask, therefore, why the politics of poor neighborhoods do not follow the lead of their origins.

NOTES

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- ⁵ Ibid., p. 27 and Lyonel C. Florant, "Negro Internal Migration," American Sociological Review, Vol. 7, No. 6 (December, 1942), p. 784.
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- ¹⁶ McWilliams, op. cit., p. 57.
- ¹⁷ Álvarez, op. cit., p. 489.
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